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STATE PASS U/S DOBRIANSKY AND U/S HUGHES, NEA/I, NEA/P,
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SUBJECT: Iraqi Scientists, Engineers Seek Funding for
Practical R&D to Support Iraq Reconstruction

Ref: Amman 3791

1. Summary: The "International Conference to Engage Iraq's Science & Technology Community in Developing its Country" took place in Amman, Jordan on September 18-20 with support and participation from DOE and State. Over fifty Iraqi scientists and engineers attended to present and seek funding for well-vetted R&D proposals in health, water, agriculture, environment, and material sciences. Several Iraqi ministries were represented at the Vice Minister level. STAS Atkinson unveiled the Iraq Virtual Science Library. USG support has created a cadre of Iraqi scientists and engineers eager and able to assist with practical reconstruction activities. Under continuing threat, however, and with little U.S. funding for their efforts to date, this cadre is a weakening pro-American bastion. End summary.

DOE NNSA and Sandia Working With Arab S&T Foundation

2. The conference was co-sponsored by the Department of Energy's (DOE) Sandia National Laboratories and the UAE-based Arab Science and Technology Foundation (ASTF). DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration also funded the conference. State representatives came from the Office of the Science and Technology Adviser to the Secretary of State (STAS), the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs' Office of S&T Cooperation (OES/STC), and State's International Security and Non-Proliferation Bureau (ISN) (formerly the Non-Proliferation Bureau). DOE was represented by NNSA's Office of Global Security Engagement and Cooperation at the Deputy Director level.

State's NP/PTR Bureau Working for Non-Proliferation

3. BACKGROUND: Both DOE and State are involved in engaging Iraqi scientists and engineers, and the agencies have cooperated closely to ensure there is not a duplication of efforts. State's program, which works through Embassy Baghdad's Iraqi Interim Center for Science and Industry (IICSI) with ISN Bureau funding, focuses on Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) scientists, with a goal of preventing WMD expertise proliferation.

4. DOE and the Arab S&T Foundation initially had a broader mission focused on reintegrating Iraqi scientists and engineers into the global science community, and utilizing their knowledge and skills for reconstruction. However, recent DOE efforts are focused on WMD scientist engagement as a priority, and proposals to be funded by DOE as a result of this conference will include WMD scientists. State is working closely with DOE to identify areas where we can collaborate and possibly fund proposals jointly.

Conference Objectives - Collaborative R&D and Funding

5. The conference's goal was to bring together three sides of a triangle: a "supply" of Iraqi and international expertise, "demand" for that expertise from ministries and other organizations in Iraq, and international funding sources.

6. Part of the development process has been to pair up Iraqi principal investigators (PI's) with international collaborators from a variety of world-class research institutions around the world, including Jordan, Egypt, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Australia, and the United States.

7. PI's and their international collaborators met in Amman in May 2005 (reftel) to hone their initial proposals. Based on the results of that meeting and further consultations following it, PI's presented over thirty carefully developed grant proposals at the September conference. Proposals focus on health, water, agriculture, environment, and material sciences, with a joint goal of re-engaging Iraqi scientists and engineers with their global colleagues and in reconstructing Iraq.

Supply, Demand and Funding - One Leg Missing

18. At the conference, there were engineers and scientists from universities all over Iraq who comprise a "supply" of experts with a wealth of practical experience and ability. Universities represented at the conference included Baghdad University, Basrah University, Al-Nahrain University, Mosul University, the Iraqi Center for Cancer and Medical Genetics Research, the Iraqi Academy of Science and Al-Mustansiriya University.

19. Representing the "demand" side of the equation, several Iraqi ministries sent high-level participants to the meeting to identify scientists who can assist with problems confronting those ministries. The Ministries of Planning, Environment, Science and Technology, Water and Construction were represented at the Vice Minister or Secretary General level.

110. Funding institutions, the third and likely most important part of the equation, were in disappointingly short supply during the conference. ASTF, DOE, and State supporters of this re-engagement process see the conference as the kick-off for a longer term outreach process to find funding for the consulting and project services that these scientists represent. UNESCO, UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the Arab League Education, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) were present. The UNESCO and ALECSO representatives addressed the plenary session at the formal opening of the conference, as did Jordanian Higher Council for Science and Technology Secretary General Dr. Khalid Elshuraydeh.

Iraqi Virtual Science Library - Liftoff!

111. STAS Dr. George Atkinson unveiled the Iraq Virtual Science Library (IVSL) at the conference. The Library is a powerful tool to provide the Iraqi scientific and engineering communities, via the Internet, with access to many professional societies' databases and thus thousands of scientific and engineering journals and current research papers. IVSL is a collaborative initiative between the Defense Department and the State Department funded by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency and managed by the National Academy of Sciences. Perhaps more than any other single factor, the IVSL will allow information-starved Iraqi scientists to catch up with the current research in a huge variety of scientific and technical fields and to increase their direct contacts with the counterparts around the world. The IVSL is undergoing "beta" testing with a group of Iraqi universities and will be officially rolled out later this year. Other academic institutions and Iraqi S&T ministries can participate in the future. Dr. Atkinson provided conference attendees with contact information at the National Academy of Sciences for future inquiries.

Press Coverage Notes Themes of Tolerance, Cooperation

112. Dr. Atkinson gave an interview to a journalist from the Jordanian daily "Al-Rai" newspaper following his speech to the plenary. The article appeared on the back page of the September 20 edition, headlined " U.S. Advisor Says: The King's Remarks and Amman Message Strike A Beautiful Chord for Tolerance and Equality." The sub-headline was "Atkinson Announces the Virtual Science Library for Iraqis Program." The article noted Atkinson's parallels between themes of tolerance, equality and cooperation that run through King Abdullah's "Amman Message," and the philosophical underpinnings of science. Atkinson also stressed the importance of good science to good policy, saying that the human condition can be improved through good science that informs the political process.

113. Comment: USG support for these R&D proposals merits serious consideration. Such support would ensure that some of the most democratic and secular members of Iraqi society (most of whom were educated in the US, UK or elsewhere in the West) can be gainfully employed to improve the lives of many Iraqi citizens and help rebuild the higher education system.

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